



"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

—Winston S. Churchill

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Beating the Rat Race (Part Three)

I Samuel 12 is instructive on the subject of finding a still, quiet place in a hectic world. It recounts a major event in the history of Israel, and as we will see, the prophet Samuel twice advises the Israelites to be still so that they could think deeply about the course they were taking. We would be wise to take his advice before making any major change of direction in life.

In I Samuel 8, the people had gathered to demand that Samuel give them a king just as all the other nations had. Besides being a prophet, Samuel was also Israel's judge at the time, and being old, he had turned most of his duties over to his two sons, Joel and Abijah. However, unlike the incorruptible Samuel, their services went to the highest bidders. Even so, Samuel was quite distressed when Israel asked for a king because he understood that their request was a thinly veiled rejection of [God](#) ([I Samuel 8:7](#)). He also knew that a king would eventually accrue to himself the nation's wealth and power and essentially enslave the populace. Nevertheless, God told Samuel to comply with their request.

Shortly thereafter, Samuel anointed Saul, a Benjamite, as king, and I Samuel 12 records Samuel's address to the people on this occasion. However, not

long before this, the Ammonites had attacked the people of Jabesh Gilead and put the city under siege. The two sides had agreed to a seven-day truce so that the people of the city could decide what they were going to do. They had hurriedly sent a note to Saul, saying, "Come help us. We are in distress."

Saul had slaughtered a yoke of oxen and sent the cut pieces to the tribes of Israel, threatening to slaughter them if they failed to help him rescue the folk of Jabesh Gilead. So the men of Israel had mustered for battle and annihilated the Ammonites. It was a resounding victory for Saul and the Israelites. In this exalted mood, the nation had gathered for Saul's coronation.

Then Saul was officially installed as king "before the LORD" ([I Samuel 11:15](#)), and afterward, Samuel rose to speak. He begins his address by reminding them that he had done as they had asked in crowning a king over them and that, in all his many years in office, he had never stolen from them, taken a bribe, or oppressed any of them. They acknowledge that he had treated them properly. He had dealt straightforwardly and honestly with them throughout his entire life.

This is an interesting introduction because it leads to what he says next. In doing so, he had established his credentials as trustworthy and truthful, so what he was about to say was worth listening to. He is about to make them aware of something vitally important.

In [I Samuel 12:6](#), he says, "It is the LORD who raised up [Moses](#) and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt." Perhaps this seems self-evident, but he is still setting the stage for his main point, making sure that they understood that God was behind everything that had ever happened in the history of Israel—certainly, He had orchestrated her most seminal events. God had called and trained Moses and Aaron for their work in freeing Israel from Egyptian bondage, and in a way, Samuel alludes to the fact that God had raised him up, too, as judge and prophet. In other words, he has the full backing of God.

Then he gives them a piece of advice: "Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD, which He did to you and your fathers" ([I Samuel 12:7](#)). They had just crowned their first king, and they were very excited, caught up in the

festivities. They had also just won a huge victory over one of their enemies, and they were aglow with jubilation and a feeling of invincibility. Being united under a king made this a new age for the land of Israel—these were exciting times! But Samuel says, "Everyone, be quiet. Calm down and let me reason with you."

Then he reiterates what God had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt and in the wilderness. After they entered the land, they had trouble with oppressive foreigners, and God had raised up judges to give them victories and shake off the oppression. Yet, free and prosperous, Israel had soon forgotten God, committed idolatry, and once again became enslaved. God had delivered them by the hand of a new judge, and this pattern of prosperity, apostasy, oppression, and deliverance repeated itself many times. The history of Israel was one of God's blessing and mercy and their perfidy and rebellion, which God countered by punishing them. This pattern, Samuel warns, would continue even though they now had a king:

Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you. If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers. ([I Samuel 12:13-15](#))

Then, the prophet repeats his advice for them to stand still, this time to "see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes" (verse 16). Samuel calls for God to send thunder and rain. What makes this storm miraculous is that Saul's coronation took place during the wheat harvest in late spring—around Pentecost—when the dry season had already begun. Thunderstorms in May or early June were unheard of, but "the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" ([I Samuel 12:18](#)).

This miracle showed the people that God backed Samuel's every word. His was a true saying from a trustworthy prophet of God. If they would listen to

reason, then they could take instruction from his address and use it to their benefit. If they would remain faithful to God, then the monarchy that they had asked for could work, just as it had worked under the righteous judges. However, if they failed to listen, then this system was no better than the last one, and they would once again be oppressed, enslaved, and scattered.

Notice the Israelites' reaction: "And all the people said to Samuel, 'Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves'" ([1 Samuel 12:19](#)). Once they stood still, they began to realize what they had done, and God's added "ka-boom" from heaven drove the point home.

Samuel's warning was tremendously serious, and the Israelites needed to be still to perceive just how far they had strayed from understanding and doing God's will. In their previous agitated, excited state, they could not truly listen to him, and they certainly could not see godly reason. The same holds true for us in these tumultuous times. If we really want to know what God is trying to tell us, we need to calm down, be still, and listen intently to His Word.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Listening](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The average American's short attention span (largely caused by media overstimulation) grows shorter all the time. Listening, which is far more important than simply hearing, is a vital spiritual skill—actually an act of love—that is exponentially important when listening or responding to the words of God. Biblical listening is not just hearing, but active understanding and responding, leading to changed (or converted) behavior. The Parable of the Sower and the Seed reveals that there are vastly different levels of listening, moving from superficial assenting to understanding to bearing fruit. Not hearing is tantamount to rebellion. Understanding and behaving

complete the listening process. We need to concentrate on 1) the faith once delivered to the saints, 2) keeping the commandments, and 3) ignoring the world's distractions.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[A Basket of Summer Fruit](#)

by Charles Whitaker

Summertime reminds us of "those lazy, hazy, crazy days" of our youth. The hot summer months are often times of careless play and distraction, of letting responsibilities lie dormant while we pursue fun and relaxation. Charles Whitaker shows that, biblically, summertime sounds a warning to us to prepare for the fall harvest, a time of judgment.

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